

Energy Fellow Justification and Details

EERMC Communications Subgroup

01/06/2021

Education & Outreach _____ \$7,500

This funding will leverage an additional \$2,500 in funding from OER to support an Energy Fellow (University of Rhode Island student) for February – December 2021. The Energy Fellow will assist with outreach, engagement, and resource creation for the farm community regarding energy management as well as targeting other traditionally underserved and hard to reach audiences. Additionally, the Energy Fellow will provide some outreach and public engagement support to OER's existing Community Solar program and other energy justice initiatives.

This is a professional development opportunity for the Energy Fellow, who will be guided by University of Rhode Island and OER staff. The farm outreach campaign will build on the foundational work done by the previous two energy fellows. This will include continuation of managing the social media accounts, developing new relationships with farmers not previously engaged, and updating marketing materials for 2021 programs and supporting potential applicants. Additional work will be conducted to develop case studies (both written and video, conditions permitting) and materials to support, educate, and engage the agricultural community. Work on the Community Solar program and energy justice initiatives will comprise public outreach, meeting attendance and note taking, and materials review and preparation.

Alignment with Mission and Justification of Need

This funding directly advances the Communications Subgroup's mission to educate businesses about energy efficiency as well as the EERMC's mission to promote cost-effective energy efficiency for all Rhode Islanders. Due to the volatile nature and seasonality of many farm businesses, keeping costs low is vital to their success. Similarly, some Rhode Islanders experience a much higher energy burden (% of their income going towards energy expenses) than others. However, participation in the half-dozen available farm energy programs and Utility focused low-income programs has remained low. Conversations with stakeholders, energy program administrators, and National Grid suggest low participation is due, in part, to a lack of knowledge of available programs. The Energy Fellow will help connect farmers and other underserved segments of the population to energy management resources and programs through online videos and written content, social media, attending professional organization meetings, conducting community outreach, and will leverage the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension's pre-existing networks.

Benefits

Benefits to target audience: Increasing outreach to these audiences through additional and existing channels will increase understanding of energy management resources, and ultimately lead to reduced energy use and lower energy bills for these population segments. Outreach to farmers is a good opportunity to cross-market energy efficiency resources for homes and businesses and engaging underserved or overlooked segments of the population ensures that our energy efficiency work is comprehensive, equitable, and accessible to all.

Professional Development Benefits: The Energy Fellow will gain unique professional experience that bridges communications, business, planning, marketing, and management skillsets.

Overview of Workplan

The Energy Fellow will work closely with Nathan Cleveland (OER), and others at OER, URI, and other agencies as needed, to ensure all following deliverables are completed successfully. The Energy Fellow will also interface with other staff at OER, National Grid, Northern Region Conservation District Farm Energy Program,

RI Department of Environmental Management, USDA, RI Infrastructure Bank, CESA and others as appropriate.

Deliverables:

1. Execute the outreach strategy that was initiated over the past two years. This will include (1) written and/or video testimonials, (2) an enhanced social media presence, (3) attendance at professional organization meetings, farmers markets, and other community events (4) other outreach and engagement channels discovered through conversations with stakeholders.
2. Build upon the existing educational “resource manual” of energy management resources, programs, and key contacts appropriate for farmers, ensure contents are up to date for 2021 programs, and research and develop additional resources for other audiences as appropriate.
3. Continue to build and maintain up-to-date contact list for both farmers and stakeholders interested in farm energy management, as well as those in the energy justice community.
4. Support the Community Solar program and other energy justice initiatives through outreach, material review/preparation, meeting coordination, and other administrative tasks.
4. Provide quarterly updates to the EERMC Communications Subgroup and a year-end report of activities, recommendations, and next steps.